

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03

RSC-01 USIA-12 PRS-01 RSR-01 /043 W  
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R 230810 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2043

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SAIGON SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 8980

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: MRS. NGO BA THANH

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION KATHMANDU MAY 22 REPEATED TO YOU

QUOTE

FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER FROM WHITEHOUSE

1. MRS. THANH'S BACKGROUND: MRS NGO BA THANH ( PHAM THI THANH VAN) WAS BORN IN HANOI SEPT 25 1931. SHE WENT TO PARIS WITH HER FATHER A DOCTOR IN 1949; MARRIED IN 1950 ( MR THAANH WAS THE GVN'S DIRECTOR OF FISHERIES 1954/68); AND THEN ATTENDED THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS( GRADUATED 1957). THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS ( PHD IN COMPARATIVE LAW 1961), AND THE UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA ( PHD 1962).

2. MRS THANH RETURNED TO VIETNAM IN 1963 AND BECAME AN INSTRUCTOR AT THE SAIGON UNIVERSITY LAW FACULTY. SHE GAINED A FAVORABLE REPUTATION IN VIETNAMESE AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CIRCLES FROM HER SCHOLARLY ARTICLES AND PRESENTATIONS AT LAW SEMINARS IN VIETNAM AND ABROAD.

3. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES: MRS THANH HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH A NUMBER OF " PEACE STRUGGLE MOVEMENTS" SINCE HER RETURN IN 1963. SHE WAS ARRESTED IN 1965 FOR PARTICIPATING IN " PEACE  
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FRONT." ( A MILITARY COURT ACQUITTED HER IN 1966; HER FATHER ALSO A PARTICIPANT, WAS REPATRIATED TO NORTH VIETNAM AND IS NOW IN PARIS) IN JUNE 1966 MRS THANH WAS ARRESTED DURING A DEMONSTRATION AT SAIGON UNIVERSITY. SHE WAS RELEASED IN

JULY 1968.

4. FROM 1968 UNTIL HER MOST RECENT ARREST IN 1971 MRS THANH TOOK PART IN A VARIETY OF ORGANIZATIONS FORMED AROUND A CORE OF NON COMMUNIST LEFTIST SAIGON INTELLECTUALS. AMONG THE ORGANIZATIONS WERE THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FORCE (1969; NOW MORIBUND); HER OWN WOMEN' S MOVEMENT TO DEMAND THE RIGHT TO LIVE (1970); THE PEOPLE' S FRONT STRUGGLING FOR PEACE (1970) AND THE COMMITTEE FOR PRISON REFORM (1970). IN EARLY 1971 MRS THANH FOUNDED PEACE FRONT A SHORT LIVED MAGAZINE. DURING THE SOMETIMES TURBULENT 1970/71 PERIOD WHEN " STRUGGLE MOVEMENT" ACTIVITIES WERE AT THEIR HEIGHT, MRS THANH WAS ALSO CLOSELY INVOLVED WITH THE SAIGON STUDENT UNION THEN HEADED BY HUYNH TAN MAM ( JAILED IN 1971). OTHER PROMINENT PERSONALITIES ALLIED WITH MRS THANH INCLUDED LAWYERS TRAN NGOC LIENG AND NGUYEN LONG( LONG WAS ARRESTED IN 1972). AND PROFESSORS CHAU TAM LUAN A GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE IN AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING, AND LY CHANH TRUNG.

5. BY MRS THANH' S OWN CANDID ADMISSION TO EMBASSY OFFICERS. HER VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES, ENERGETIC AS THEY WERE. PRODUCED SCANTY RESULTS. HER WOMEN' S RIGHT TO LIVE MOVEMENT PROBABLY ATTRACTED NO MORE THAN A FEW DOZEN ACTIVE MEMBERS DESPITE MRS THANH' S EFFORT TO FORM CHAPTERS THROUGHOUT THE NATION. MOST VIETNAMESE SHOWED NO INTEREST IN THE " FRONTS" AND " MOVEMENTS" OF MRS THANH. BY CONTRAST MR THANH ENJOYED A PUBLIC RELATIONS SUCCESS WITH FOREIGN NEWS MEDIA AND FOREIGN VISITORS WHO SOUGHT HER OUT. HER OVERSEAS REPUTATION WAS ENHANCED BY HER CORRESPONDENCE WITH FOREIGN WOMEN' S ORGANIZATIONS AND THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF HER FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES IN EUROPE, AMERICA AND ELSEWHERE. ALSO DURING HER STUDIES IN THE US, SHE HAD ACQUIRED A WIDE CIRCLE OF AMERICAN FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES.

6. MS THANH' S CURRENT ROUND OF DIFFICULTIES BEGAN IN JUNE 1971  
( A) ON JUNE 22 1971 MRS THANH WITH SOME COLLEAGUES FROM  
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WOMEN' S ASSOCIATION TO DEMAND THE RIGHT TO LIVE WERE PRESENT AS OBSERVERS AT A CIVIL TRIAL IN GIA DINH PROVINCE TO DETERMINE OCCUPANCY RIGHTS IN A BUDDHIST PAGODA. APPARENTLY THE COURTS DECISION DISPLEASED THE LADIES AND AFTER THE TRIAL A CONFUSED SCENE ENSUED. ONE ACCOUNT STATES THAT MRS THANH AND HER FRIENDS

CURSED THE PRESIDING JUDGE AND MANHANDLED HIM AS HE SOUGHT TO LEAVE. MRS THANH CLAIMS THAT THE JUDGE TRIPPED BY HIMSELF. ON AUGUST 17 SHE WAS ARRESTED ON CHARGES WHICH APPEAR TO BE THE VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENT OF CONTEMPT OF COURT FOR HER ALLEGED ROLE IN THE JUNE 22 COURTHOUSE MELEE AND HER FAILURE TO RESPOND TO TWO OR MORE SUMMONESSES ALLEGEDLY ISSUED BETWEEN JUNE 22 AND

AUGUST 16. ON SEPTEMBER 6 HER REQUEST FOR RELEASE ON BAIL WAS DENIED AND SHE WAS REMANDED TO CHIA HOA PRISON. THE COURT RELEASED HER ON BAIL OF VN\$2000 ( ABOUT \$17 AT THE OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATE). THERE IS NO RECORD OF FURTHER ACTION ON THIS ARREST AND THE CHARGES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN DROPPED.

( B) MRS THANH' S NEXT( AND LAST) ARREST OCCURRED ON SEPTEMBER 18 1971 DURING AN UNAUTHORIZED DEMONSTRATION IN FRONT OF THE LOWER HOUSE.

7. MRS THANH HAS BEEN IN JAIL CONTINUOUSLY SINCE HER ARREST ON SEPT 18 1971. THE FIRST AND ONLY TIME SHE CAME BEFORE A COURT WAS MARCH 22 1972 WHEN SHE WAS BROUGHT FOR TRIAL BEFORE A MILITARY FIELD COURT IN SAIGON. BECAUSE SHE WAS

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ACTION EA-14

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SUFFERING FROM ASTHMA, AND WAS QUITE EVIDENTLY ILL, THE COURT AGREED TO A DEFENSE MOTION TO POSTPONE THE HEARING UNTIL HER HEALTH IMPROVED. THE COURT DENIED A MOTION TO RELEASE HER TO THE CUSTODY OF HER FAMILY AND PRIVATE PHYSICIAN AND INSTEAD REMANDED HER TO PRISON AND THE CARE OF PRISON PHYSICIANS. SHE WAS KEPT AT CHI HOA PRISON UNTIL DEC 1972 - AND WAS THEN MOVED TO THE BIEN HOA REFORMATORY. FAMILY MEMBERS HAD BEEN PERMITTED TO VISIT HER REGULARLY UNTIL LAST MONTH. THEY STATED ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS THAT SHE APPEARED TO BE RECEIVING ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE. THE FAMILY WAS REFUSED PERMISSION TO SEE HER FROM APRIL 13 TO MAY 3.

8. MRS THANH' S ATTORNEY FILED A MOTION FOR DISMISSAL OF THE CASE

CONCERNING HER SEPTEMBER 18 1971 ARREST WITH THE SUPREME COURT IN LATE MAR 1972, CLAIMING THAT HER PRE TRIAL DETENTION HAD EX-

CEEDED THE TIME ALLOWED IN MILITARY FIELD COURT CASES. ( THE LIMIT IS ONE MONTH; SHE WAS DETAINED SUBSTANTIALLY LONGER.) THE COURT HAS NOT ACTED ON NOR REPLIED TO THE MOTION TO DATE. CHIEF JUSTICE TRAN VAN LINH HAS TOLD US THAT THE PETITION IS UNDER STUDY IN ONE OF THE COMMITTEES OF THE COURT AND THAT THERE IS NOTHING

THAT HE OR THE REST OF THE COURT CAN DO TO BREAK IT LOOSE.

9. MRS THANH WENT ON A HUNGER STRIKE AT BIEN HOA REFORMATORY ON APRIL 10. IN PROTEST AGAINST PRESIDENT THIEU'S STATEMENTS (MADE DURING HIS TRIP TO THE US AND EUROPE) THAT THERE ARE NO POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE RVN. ON APRIL 13 SHE WAS REMOVED TO THU DUC AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
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ON APRIL 18 TO THE NATIONAL POLICE HOSPITAL. SHE WAS FED INTRAVENOUSLY UNTIL HER MALNUTRITION ADVANCED TO THE POINT THAT HER VEINS COLLAPSED. HER FAMILY REPORTS THAT POLICE HOSPITAL PHYSICIANS HAVE RESORTED TO RECTAL ALIMENTATION PROCEDURES TO GIVE HER SODIUM AND SUGAR FOR NUTRIMENT AND TO TREAT HER DEHYDRATION. SHE HAD ADDED A "THIRST STRIKE" TO THE HUNGER STRIKE ABOUT APRIL 30 RESULTING IN SERIOUS DEHYDRATION). ACCORDING TO AN EMBASSY PHYSICIAN, PATIENTS IN THIS CONDITION MAY WEAKEN MORTALLY WITH LITTLE WARNING.

10. MRS THANH'S HUNGER STRIKE AND REMOVAL FROM BIEN HOA REFORMATORY CAUGHT THE ATTENTION AFP, WHICH FILED STORIES ON IT. SINCE THEN JOURNALISTS HAVE RAISED HER CASE AT A NUMBER OF GVN PRESS BRIEFINGS.

11. THE GVN DOES NOT YET APPEAR TO HAVE A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS CONCERNING ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CASE. PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY GVN SPOKESMAN HAVE HAD INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS AND HAVE NOT BEEN IN ACCORD WITH PRIVATE COMMENTS MADE TO EMBASSY OFFICERS BY RESPONSIBLE GVN OFFICIALS.

12. GVN SPOKESMAN TRUC DURING THE PERIOD APRIL 18 TO MAY 3 TOLD THE PRESS THAT MRS THANH WAS RECEIVING REGULAR VISITS FROM HER PRIVATE PHYSICIAN HER LAWYER AND HER FAMILY WHEN IN FACT SHE HAD NOT.

13. ON MAY 18:

(A) SPOKESMAN TRUC ANNOUNCED THAT MRS THANH WOULD BE TURNED OVER TO OTHER SIDE;

(B) BG LE TRUNG TRUC TOLD EMBASSY THAT PRESIDENT THIEU HAD DECIDED NOT TO TURN MRS THANH OVER TO THE COMMUNISTS;

(C) COLONEL HUYNH NGOC DIEP AT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TOLD ANOTHER EMBASSY THAT A FINAL DECISION HAD NOT YET BEEN MADE.

14. COMMENT: WHEN MORE DEFINITIVE INFORMATION IS RECEIVED ON GVN THINKING REGARDING THE THANH CASE, WE SHALL FORWARD IT TO YOU. UNQUOTE  
WHITEHOUSE

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